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ABSTRACT

The author of this paper argues that historically and traditionally black colleges must not be subjected to integration and mergers with white institutions because they would then be in danger of losing their black identity. There are 3 interrelated premises that support this point of view. (1) The black college by appropriately interpreting the black experience and by revealing and analyzing the impact of racism, can free both black and white America from the bondage of psychological taboos and misconceptions. (2) The black college's mission is to guarantee that equality of opportunity for all Americans becomes a reality. (3) The black college as a power base can provide the force, the vision, and the resources to promote needed change and to lift the quality of life within the black community. The author concludes that there is a clear need for both blacks and whites to see distinguished black achievements and to see black professionals in command of a major societal power base. The mere presence of these colleges is bound to affect society's values. (Author/HS)

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# THE PHILOSOPHICAL JUSTIFICATIONS FOR BLACK COLLEGES IN MULTIRACIAL SOCIETY*

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"WHAT HAPPENS TO A DREAM DEFERRED..
DOES IT DRY UP LIKE A RAISIN IN THE SUN...?"

We assemble here today to reaffirm the quest of black Americans for equal opportunity. In approximately four years America will celebrate its bicentennial - two hundredth birthday of the Declaration of Independence.

Over one hundred years have passed since the Emancipation Proclamation. Yet black Americans are still in search of the fulfillment of the dream of America as a land of opportunity.

The black colleges and universities, some of which were founded over a century ago, have represented the one vehicle of hope for black Americans. They have helped to give this nation vitality and strength. We offer no apology or defense for these colleges. We do not need to prove their value. History has amply demonstrated their worth.

Why then do we question their future? Why are black Americans troubled and anxious? Put simply, black colleges are in imminent danger of extinction - of losing their racial identities. This fear is no paranoid illusion. It is real.

Bluefield State, West Virginia State, Lincoln University - Missouri were once predominantly black. Now, they are predominantly white. Others are appearing on the horizon. Suggestions have been made that Morgan, Coppin and Towson should merge and become a University of Metropolitan Baltimore.

Many other examples, too numerous to mention, suggest that the trend is national and pervasive.

What is the explanation? Black colleges were founded at a special moment in history. The educational opportunities they provided for black Americans were not available in meaningful terms in the established colleges and universities.

Although educational opportunity was the primary motive, these colleges were also established to perpetuate segregation as a way of life. In a real sense, they were responses to racism.

The doctrine of "separate but equal" never became a reality. Neither was there a firm public commitment to make it so. Now that this policy has been replaced by integration, one wonders if this too is not a smokescreen for the accomplishment of other objectives.

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We hear the rhetoric calling for an end to racial dualism in higher education. For reasons of effeciency and economy educators and legislators advocate the merger of separate black and white colleges which are located in the same area. The elimination of the racial identifiability of all institutions of higher learning appears to be the national goal.

Thus, for black Americans, there is the legitimate fear that integration, mergers and reduction in status will, by deliberate design, destroy the identities of black colleges and universities.

The major question which emerges is whether there is consistency in a policy which promotes integration on one hand and preserves the racial identity of black colleges on the other. Many persons will argue that the historical missions of black colleges is no longer relevant in today's world.

Those persons who advance this argument are like ostrichs who hide their heads in the sand believing they can escape the sad realities of life.

Equal opportunity for black Americans never has been and is not now an accomplished goal. Black colleges have a special and unique mission to help America become the America it was intended to be.

Black colleges will be saved. They will retain their identities - not for the sake of themselves alone but for the sake of America and it future.

America will reach it zenith as a civilization only when full freedom and real equality of opportunity have been secured for all it citizens. The black college is indespensable to this quest.

This is the general thesis - the argument - the case for their survival and support.

There are three interrelated premises which support this principle position.

1. The black college by appropriately interpreting the black experience and by revealing and analyzing the impact of racism, can free both black and white America from the bondage of psychological taboos and misconceptions.

2. The black college's mission is to guarantee that equality of opportunity for all Americans becomes a reality.

3. The black college as a power base can provide the force, the vision and the resources to promote needed change and to lift the quality of life within the black community.

The first argument is that the black college is peculiarly equipped to analyze and interpret the black experience and the impact of racism in America.

America's first step to freedom consists in understanding the legacy of its post - in recognizing that racism is a fact. White Americans must begin with some perception of the black experience and of its profound relevance to their own quest for their lost humanity.

Only the naive would wonder why blacks have not moved in larger numbers into the mainstream as have other ethnic minorities.

No other ethnic minority in America carries a badge of color which gives it visibility and identification and which is used to maintain its relationship to the past.

All other immigrant groups were free to move into the mainstream of American life and to pursue the goals which were not and are not yet available to American blacks.

For other immigrants, America became the land of opportunity. For black Americans, it became the land of bigotry and oppresion.

Yes, white Americans must understand the historical and contemporary impact of the black presence in America. Black colleges can provide the prototypes for this enlightment.

Indeed, during the turbulent era of the sixties black students in black colleges formed the advance guard for the reawakening of America to the meaning of social justice. It is appropriate to review this period in our history and the lessons we learned.

The black college campus and its students helped to give America hope and progress toward total freedom.

Through their protests, black students exposed the sham and hypocrisy which was a part of America. They helped to place in bold relief the mockery of law and order slogans when they challenged the structure and practice of justice. They helped to reveal a little more of the reality of America and deepened our conviction that so long as any of our brothers and sisters are enslaved, likewise the rest of us are dehumanized by the conditions which permit their bondage.

By refusing to scratch where they did not itch and to laugh when there was no humor, they brought candor and honesty to white and black relations.

Out of their expressions came a deep concern for black institutions - for their roles in helping America understand its greatest dilemma and in devising strategies to overcome neglects of the past.

The psychological, spiritual and social revolt which was born on these campuses still has not been thoroughly grasped.

Reflect, if you please, upon the climate and character of those times. Black Americans had reached the low point of tolerance and frustration. The pendulum had to swing in the opposite direction. What many critics saw as an obsession with blackness - however expressed - also helped many black Americans overcome the brainwashing, the ego castration to which many had been subjected from infancy to young adulthood.

We had been nourished in a society which denied us a cloak of dignity and distorted our aesthetic values. We had been bombarded with stimuli which made us believe our presence in America was unreal or non-existant - which so thwarted our self concept that we not only believed we were inferior but many were forced to act the role. We even became disgusted with the way we looked.

Young black students helped to reverse this behavior and attitude. They helped to turn self-hate into a positive image - a self concept, self-love and esteem - racial pride and dignity. This was a profound revolution - so profound that many have not thoroughly understood its implications.

I strongly believe that the movement toward a positive self concept is one of the greatest legacies black Americans could have received. Black colleges and their black students helped Americans realize that the first real step to freedom is to break the shackles of psychological bondage - to free oneself from the prisons of self-hate and despair - to recognize as did the poet, "Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage."

The surge toward black studies must be carefully monitored and interpreted, Black colleges have within their command the expertise to set the standards - the guidelines for the honest and scholarly study of the black experience.

Because black studies has more than intellectual and scholarly utility, because it is also psychologically necessary, there is a need for centers of honest scholarship, study and inquiry. Black colleges can provide these services.

The ramifications are broad and substantial. A proper study of the black experience can assist all of higher education in healing busted egos and restoring self dignity, esteem and confidence in black students whose motivations have been suppressed.

We can succeed in reopening the doors which have been closed to so many students whose potentials were judged by defective instruments developed for the majority culture. Black colleges can force the creation of new educational models for the cultural atypical, the underprepared and under motivated student.

I sincerely doubt whether white colleges are competant or committed to address this critical need. Their experiences in responding to black student protest in the sixties certainly aroused suspicions.

Confronted by black student demands, many educators retreated while others simply fled. Many of these colleges simply pacified black students with phoney black studies courses, often taught by instant overnight experts.

I so vivdly recall the frantic telephone call from a dean of a predominantly white college. He desperately needed a black faculty member because the black student union was poised outside his office.

I inquired about his qualifications, he replied that these were unimportant. He simply had to be black. I inquired further about salary.

This was not important either. He was willing to pay 20,000 and $25,000 if he had a clearly visible afro.

This is only one example of a kind of lunacy which prevailed during that period. Fortunately, many of the idealogical controversies which colleges created were soon exposed for the sham they were.

Black colleges and black educators are needed more than ever to insure that the teaching of the black perspective is honest and true. These colleges know more than any others how to teach students that black is beautiful. But more than that, they can help black students understand that when they enter the real world of competition, they will stand alone - that their success or failure will depend upon their adoptable intellectual tools and not upon what their black heroes have accomplished.

If black colleges can provide the models for understanding and teaching the black experience, they will move America a little closer to full freedom and equality.

The second argument in the case for black colleges is that without them the quest for equal apportunity is a fantasy - a dream never to be fulfilled.

The current occupational trend shows an increase in the white collar and a decrease in the blue collar sector. It is in the latter category that we find the largest number of blacks.

If black Americans are to enter the occupational mainstream at levels which will enable them to influence the style of life of this country, we must do more to increase educational opportunity. The number of blacks in higher education must be substantially increased during the decade of the 70's and beyond.

It appears that universal higher education may become more of a public responsibility. If this happens the lessening of financial barriers will enable larger numbers of blacks to enter higher education.

There is little persuasive evidence to suggest that predominantly white colleges will absorb this responsibility. The risk or cost of educating large numbers of black students is very high for the predominantly white college. SAT scores would deny entry to many of these students. Moreover, the experience of these colleges with high risk students is recent and limited. Some of them still consider black students as intellectually indigent and uneducable. It is not reasonable to assume that they will shift their priorities and mission to accommodate a large portion of the expected increase in black enrollment.

On the other hand, the education of black students had been and still is the business of black colleges. These colleges have a mission which extends beyond minority access to higher education. They are committed to maximizing the probability of minority success in higher education.

As a group, these colleges have been the most open in American society. They have developed special competencies in the education of a highly

diversified clientele which includes the gifted, the average, as well as the cultural atypical and underprepared student.

They have been the objects of attack and have been branded by some as second rate and as academic disaster areas. It is unfortunate that the critics have been unable to grasp the full impact of these colleges.

The real meaning of quality education has eluded these critics. They have never understood that quality in higher education is not found in admissions criteria or in test scores. Rather, it lies in the capacity of a college to promote and induce profound changes in its students.

The important question is not whether a black college produces graduates on a par with Harvard or Princeton. This is not its primary task or mission. If it provides the opportunity for a student to acquire the learning tools of life, to raise the level of his intellectual understanding, to develop the skills necessary to compete effectively in the world of work and to actualize his full potential as a human being, this college has accomplished its mission.

The relevant test of quality is the before and after - the personal change which the college provoke - the creation of the opportunity for a person to go as far as his abilities will permit.

When judged by this standard the black college stands tall among its white counterparts. Many of the prestige typed institutions of higher learning admit students who are already like the products they intend to graduate. Many are more interested in predicting their track records than in promoting profound personal growth. They are like the physician who prefers to treat only the healthy.

The education of increasing numbers of black Americans is such an important and critical priority that it cannot be left to institutions to fit into their schedules. It is a responsibility which must be assumed by colleges which have as their essential mission the education of black youth.

As we seek to define educational opportunity we must recognize that one of its components is providing black students with multiple options. They must have the freedom to choose a black college. This freedom is real only if these colleges survive.

Why is this freedom of choice so important? Hundreds of years of socio-economic deprivation have left their mark. Black students with castrated egos, damaged self images and poor academic preparation must be given the opportunity to have their personhood restored.

For many black students, the black college is the only environment in which this personal objective can be accomplished. They would prefer the comforting climate of a black campus with black adult and peer model figures to one which may be coldly hostile and unfamiliar. They should not be denied this freedom of choice. It may be their only hope for personal success.

This same freedom of choice must also be available for white Americans. White students are attending black colleges in increasing numbers. They are studying under black teachers and are interacting with black students and black adults. The environment is obviously different from what they would experience in predominantly white colleges. They become minority citizens for the first time.

The cultural shock and psychological reorientation could have profound positive impacts upon the lives of these students. I once heard a white student in a black college remark about his experience.

All his life he had considered himself free. Prior to entering college he had been in an integrated environment but it was one dominated and controlled by whites. He never once related to a black authority figure. Now he had discovered what it meant to be a minority. But more important, he acquired a deep understanding of the meaning of freedom - an aspiration he had previously taken for granted. This, coupled with a new awareness of the black experience, gave him a new sense of purpose. He deeply believed that he had acquired sensitivities and developed a capacity for leadership in human relations. This experience would not have been available to him in a predominantly white college.

Black colleges can perform this unique service of expanding the educational options available to both black and white Americans. They can become new kinds of laboratories for experimentation in human relations. In this role, black colleges can provide white Americans with educational opportunities which may free them from their own bondage and enable them to assume new leadership positions within our society.

In our pursuit of equal opportunity as a goal for all Americans, we must be certain we understand all of its dimensions. When we consider the historical conditions and inequities imposed upon black Americans, we know that justice requires more than equal treatment. Any system which treats black and white colleges as a group alike is inherently discriminatory.

The opportunity we seek for black youth must therefore be more than equal. They cannot be asked to begin a race when they are already behind at the starting line. The historical deprivations have created inequalities which can only be remedied by over equal opportunity for black youth. Only then will we close the gap which now separates white and black Americans.

The third argument is that black colleges are indispensable power bases within their communities. Their potential for influencing change and improving the quality of life have been clearly demonstrated over the years. These colleges can be strengthened to increase their impact upon formulating solutions to many of our urban ills.

This role of urban extension in the decade of the seventies will become a major priority for many or most of our nation's black colleges. The elimination of poverty and the ghetto must become priority goals to be realized within this century.

Black colleges have a responsibility to provide the knowledge base which the appropriate agencies in society can use to make alternative judgements and decisions. These colleges must produce the managers, the professionals, the intelligent and skilled manpower - persons who will assume leadership roles and serve as change agents in the larger society. The record for the black college is more than admirable. America can ill afford to lose such a vital resource.

The lessons of experience are powerful and enduring. Blacks have little reason to believe that the interest of the black community will be adequately promoted by white institutions and white leadership.

The credibility of black colleges within the black community is high. To insure this believability and hope the leadership of these colleges must remain ostensibly and visibly black.

We must understand that simple involvement for black Americans is not sufficient. Shared power and control must also be promoted. The black college as a power base can guarantee these goals.

I have argued that black colleges are necessary for the survival of America. We cannot permit integration or mergers to engulf us, destroy our identities and thus diminish our service.

We live in a multiracial and pluralistic society. Our educational institutions must reflect this reality. As a black American, I will passionately resist the misuse of the slogan or aim of integration to eliminate or reduce our institutions.

I have seen the decline of black high school administrators in the south - black principals more qualified than their white counterparts reduced to the demeaning status of assistant principals in charge of buses.

I have seen the elimination of black schools and their absorption by the white ones with the discarding of the symbols of black pride.

I have witnessed resegregation in the midst of desegregation with accompanying humiliation and dehumanization of black children and with the dominant culture more in complete command.

I recall the black high school students in a western North Carolina city who, one morning suddenly discovered they no longer had a school song and trophy case - symbols of deep emotional meaning for them.

This is the dilemma of integration. Promote it we must, but not at our educational and psychological detriment.

When and if HEW insists that many of our colleges must lose their racial identification, we must understand what this really means. We must rise to protest.

Under the guise of integration, black colleges may lose their identities as black colleges and simply become predominantly white with minority enrollments. We fail to see that racial identification has ceased to be. It has simply changed its form. What we have then are all predominantly white colleges. The racial identity is still there except that it is white.

But, we are told, the real concern is not the label or identity of the college, but is increasing educational opportunity for black youth. The issue, we are told, is minority access to higher education.

This is more illusary than real. The dominant and genuine concern is not so much with minority access to higher education as it is with minority success in higher education. This is where the black colleges have made their case - have proven their competency.

So long as our society is infected with any vestige of racism and disregard for human dignity, there will always be a need for black colleges to answer the needs of black Americans.

We will remain symbols of pride, possession and power for our people. We still belong to them. They have an emotional investment and stake in our present and in our future.

We have a responsibility to them to continue to be the citadels of leadership and influence. More than all other institutions in America, the black colleges can indeed serve as architects of the destiny of black Americans.

There is a clear need for both blacks and whites to see distinguished black achievements and to see black professionals in command of a major societal power base. The mere presence of these colleges is bound to affect society's values.

With these colleges, black Americans have a feeling of hope. We are not ready to exchange these concrete possessions for fleeting dreams.

With this in mind, all of us, black and white, must signal the coming of a new era - one in which token philanthropy is replaced with public responsibility for the education of all Americans. We cannot ignore the lessons of history. A people denied is a nation destroyed.

Robert Kennedy once said, "Some men see things as they are and ask why. I dream of things that never were and ask why not."

Martin Luther King had a dream which he never saw fulfilled. Both men dreamed and cried out for a better America. They died for their cause.

But we still live and can dedicate our lives to the principles they advocated. Our dreams must not become dreams deferred.

They must blossom into the realities which will make of America the true land of opportunity.